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CLAM POINT

DORCHESTER / A DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

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Every Boston neighborhood has its own development history, shaped by landfill operations, transportation networks, population booms, and financial ups and downs, and recorded in the street patterns, changes in land use, and architectural styles of the homes, shops and other buildings that are part of our everyday landscape.

In particular, the architecture of a neighborhood contributes to the sense of place and identity that its residents feel. If we know what to look for, the architecture can also describe our neighborhoods' earlier days and the ambitions and expectations of the earlier Bostonians who lived there.

The architectural survey work conducted by the Boston Landmarks Commission provides fascinating and valuable information about the development of Boston's neighborhoods. I hope that this booklet, and others like it, will add to our understanding of the origins of our neighborhoods and the historic forces that created them, and will promote ongoing interest in the maintenance and preservation of our architectural heritage.

*Kevin H. White, Mayor
City of Boston*



“Harrison Square,
Situating at Commercial Point, has been laid out
and built upon within a few years. This is a quiet
and desirable location, and is fast growing up to be
a smart village. The cars pass through this place
many times during the day and evening.”

—Environs of Boston, An Almanac and Business Directory of the Cities of Cambridge, Charlestown, and Roxbury, and the Towns of Chelsea, Dorchester, Brighton, and Brookline. Boston: David Clapp, 1848.

HARRISON SQUARE The development history of Harrison Square, now called Clam Point, as a fashionable 19th-century residential district is closely tied to the growth of industrial activity at nearby Commercial Point and the construction of the Old Colony Railroad through Dorchester in the mid-1840's. Now the flat, open site of the Boston Gas Company storage tanks, Commercial Point was originally a narrow-necked, hilly promontory which separated two deep coves of Dorchester Bay. These inlets from the bay, later known as the Barque Warwick Cove and Tenean Creek, looped around the area which was later developed as Clam Point and trickled as far west as today's Dorchester Avenue.

The irregularity of the coast near Commercial Point provided excellent opportunities for damming and mill development. During the 18th century, the Tileston grist mill was constructed on Tenean Creek just inland from the bay, and the westerly end of Mill Street (now part of Victory Road) was cut through from Adams Street as the mill's access road.

Industrial development of Commercial Point did not occur until 1800, when the peninsula was

purchased by Joseph Newell and Ebenezer Niles. The new owners intended to erect a dam across the creek to the opposite shore in order to gain sufficient water power for the construction of mills and manufactories. This proposal was blocked by the owners of the old Tileston Mill, which was situated just above the projected dam. Newell and Niles revised their development plans and initiated shipbuilding operations on the Point, probably in connection with their involvement in mercantile trade. The enterprise was short-lived, however, and the buildings and wharves constructed on Commercial Point became vacant and dilapidated after a few years.





19 Ashland



4 Everdean Street



21 Mill Street



7 Everett Street



36-38 Park Street

To accommodate development in anticipation of the opening of the railroad, a grid of residential streets was laid out just north of Mill Street and east of the Old Colony line. This grid included Ashland, Park, Everett, and Elm Streets, which during the 1840's began to fill with the houses of successful businessmen commuters. Houses surviving from the early railroad era include a number of monumental residences, several of which retain their original appearance and siting on large, deep, heavily landscaped lots.

One of the most notable residences in all of Dorchester dating from this period is the house built for Elisha T. Loring at 21 Mill Street, at the corner of Ashland Street. This sophisticated Greek Revival style dwelling, deeply set back from both streets and located on an acre and a half lot, was built around 1845. Distinguishing the Loring House is its elegant Ionic entrance porch

with second floor gallery, its Ionic side porch, and its pedimented gable ends with half-moon fanlight windows. A carriageway originally curved across the lot from Ashland Street, and a barn was located to the rear of the house. The grounds include many substantial trees, among them a pair of magnificent copper beeches. Originally enclosing the Mill and Ashland Street frontages was a turned picket fence with strengthening iron pickets inserted approximately once every fifteen. A long section of this handsome fence is still standing.

Elisha T. Loring, the owner and occupant of this house for over 40 years, was active for half a century in the tin and copper trade with South American ports. He owned a fleet of vessels which developed into the National Dock Company, located at East Boston. Born in Barnstable in 1804, Loring moved to Dorchester from Boston in the mid-1840's and

remained at 21 Mill Street until his death in 1889.

Contemporary with the Loring House are several other Greek Revival houses including 19 Elm Street (now somewhat altered) which was sited right on Loring's westerly lot line and is now sandwiched between two later triple-deckers. A substantial Greek Revival double house with an Ionic front porch remains at 36-38 Park Street. Three Greek Revival houses occupy the south side of Everett Street, the most interesting being 7 Everett, which was built around 1845 and has been attributed to the architect Joseph C. Howard. Located on a spacious lot, this gable-roofed house is notable for its Doric-columned porch, which extends across its front, side and rear. The adjacent house at 13 Everett was the home of Axel Dearborn who, true to his name, owned the iron forge at Commercial Point and manufactured car axles, cranks, and locomotives.

Several of the larger 1840's houses are no longer standing, among them the Franklin King House, which was located on the southerly corner of Mill and Everett Streets, now the site of the Byrne Playground. King was a prominent Boston businessman who was active in the paint and oil trade. He was also a wholesale druggist and a major Dorchester real estate developer. Like his neighbor Elisha Loring, King lived at his Harrison Square residence from the 1840's until his death at the end of the century. During the 1930's, the Franklin King House was used as the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital.

Although housing continued to be built on Commercial Point, around mid-century it was extensively developed as an industrial area. Industrial development on the Point revolved around Dearborn's forge, Emory's timber and coal wharf, and John Preston's chocolate manufactory. The

shoreline near Park and Commercial Streets became a district of wharves, lumber yards and saw mills, some owned by Albert and William Pope, who lived nearby on Commercial and Mill Streets. At this time, Commercial Street was extended to the south, crossing Tenean Creek and continuing on to the intersection of Neponset and Ashmont Streets.



31 Mill Street



33 Mill Street



37 Mill Street



9 Ashland Street



25 Park Street





23 Park Street

Also developing at mid-century was a local commercial center near the Harrison Square railroad depot, which included the Mattapan Bank, a bowling saloon, the Mattapan Library, and a provision store. Adjacent to the station, Exchange Street, now the site of the Alsen-Mapes industrial park, was lined with houses and stores.

With the completion of the railroad, Mill Street continued to develop as an elegant avenue of substantial residences. The houses at 31, 33, 37, and 41 Mill Street, set on very deep lots with generous uniform set-backs, were all built by 1850 and established a building pattern that would continue over the next 40 years. These four houses were the homes of wealthy commuters and, significantly, their lots all back onto the Old Colony right-of-way. Of these buildings, the handsome Italianate style residence at 31 Mill Street remains the most notable for the

preservation of its period architectural features. This house changed ownership several times during its early history, and in the 1860's it was partially remodelled by Dorchester architect Luther Briggs, who designed the existing arched doorway and entry porch.

More modest Italianate style houses were built along Ashland and Elm Streets. The bracketed house on the corner lot at 9 Ashland Street has undergone several alterations that have added to its charm, including the ground-floor bay window with its branch patterned stained glass window and plasterwork floral panel. Thomas J. Allen, a bookkeeper who worked in Boston, lived in this house from the 1850's to the end of the century.

Walling Map, Detail, 1859

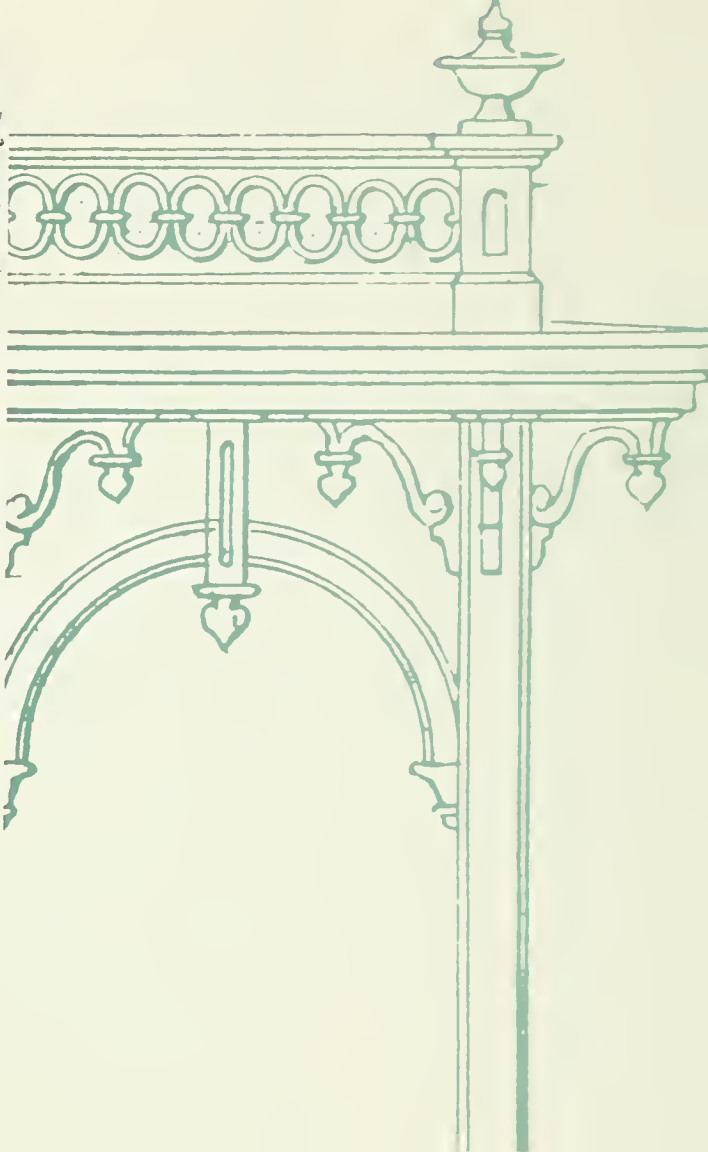




2 Everett Street



Humphrey House



It was during the 1850's and 1860's that the strong influence of architect Luther Briggs was felt in the area. Briggs (1822-1905) received his training under Alexander Parris (architect for the Faneuil Hall Markets) and Gridley J.F. Bryant (who designed Old City Hall) and set up his own office in Boston in the mid-1840's. With the construction of the railroad, he became involved in the building up of the new suburbs that were developing along the commuter lines. He was very active in Dorchester, where he designed residential and commercial buildings and was employed as surveyor for large subdivisions including Port Norfolk, where he lived during the 1860's.

Built in 1855 after designs by Briggs and remodeled by him in 1866, the Charles Jenkins House at 23 Park Street is distinguished by its low mansard roof, paired brackets at the overhanging

roofline, heavy trim, and bracketed central entry and side porch.

On the adjacent lot at 25-27 Park Street, the Joseph C. Lindsley House, also dating from the 1850's, was a splendid Italianate style building that has lost much of its original design and ornamentation. Early photographs show that the house had elegant side porches and was similar to the Jenkins House in its entrance design, ornament, and window treatment, suggesting that Briggs was the architect. Lindsley, the head of one of Boston's leading firms in the shoe and leather trade, was an active abolitionist whose house was a well-known stop on the "underground railroad." His business partner, Theron V. Shaw, moved next door into the Jenkins House during the 1860's and another partner, Rufus Gibbs, lived on Elm Street and then moved to 8 Everett Street in the 1880's.

Also designed by Briggs is the mansard-roofed Benjamin Manson House at 2 Everett Street, at the corner of Park Street, built in 1859 and now much modernized. Briggs was also responsible for the design of the Francis J. Humphrey House, built around 1868 and formerly located at 3 Mill Street, near Commercial Street. Remodelings of this period credited to Briggs, in which then-fashionable architectural features were added to older houses, include those for the Preston family at 32 Mill Street and for Hiram Emerson and Gorham Train at 31 Mill Street.

Beach Street was opened to the street pattern at Harrison Square in the 1850's. Along the street was the only dwelling on the street was the Old Shepley House, a large Italianate dwelling which was destroyed by fire several years ago. Shepard, one of the most successful lumber merchants in the eastern states, was born on Dorchester's Meeting House Hill in 1827. He joined the Albert and William Pope Lumber Company on Commercial Point while in his teens, and during the 1870's formed the Shepard and Morse Lumber Company which developed into a major concern. Lumber wharves owned by Shepard were located off of Commercial Street in the vicinity of Beach and Park Streets.





42 Mill Street

Subdivision of the Preston Estate in the 1870's and 1880's resulted in the selling off of house lots and the construction of three imposing residences on the south side of Mill Street. The substantial mansard house at 42 Mill Street was built around 1870 for Charles F. Burditt, a dealer in hardware and cutlery whose business was advertised as the "Largest Builders' Hardware Dealers East of New York". Adjacent to the Burditt House, at 44 Mill Street, is a mansard-roofed residence with a domed cupola and period carriage house. This house was built around 1872 for Albe C. Clark, a successful Boston attorney and a long-time Dorchester resident (formerly of Port Norfolk), who occupied his Mill Street home for 30 years. With his Mill Street neighbor Elisha T. Loring, Clark was a staunch opponent of the annexation of Dorchester to the City of Boston. Across Greenhill Street at 40 Mill Street is an early Colonial Revival



44 Mill Street

house with hipped roof, hexagonal cupola, and pedimented central bay, which was built for Boston businessman William H.L. Smith around 1882.

During the decade after annexation, an intensive period of growth occurred west of Harrison Square and the Old Colony Railroad. A series of streets between Commercial (Freeport) Street and Dorchester Avenue began to develop with small-scale houses, including workers' rows and multiple-family dwellings. The construction of this working-class and lower middle-class housing, which occurred on Leonard, Granger, Greenwich, Duncan, and Kimball Streets at Field's Corner, was stimulated by the horsecar lines which were laid down Dorchester Avenue in 1857, and which by the 1870's provided efficient and relatively inexpensive transportation to Boston. Increased industrial development on Commercial Street and



40 Mill Street

Commercial Point further encouraged the building up of a working-class district adjacent to affluent Harrison Square. Clearly representing "the other side of the tracks," this densely developed area sharply contrasted with the neighboring community around Mill Street with its spacious lots, lush landscaping, and often imposing single-family homes.



43 Mill Street



8 Everett Street



26-28 Mill Street



43 Beach Street



29 Mill Street

While the area west of the railroad was developing into a predominantly working-class Irish district, substantial residences continued to be built in the Harrison Square area. Several houses dating from this period are excellent examples of Stick Style architecture, which is best characterized by its use of vertical and horizontal banding on wall surfaces, pent window or door hoods, and stick-like detailing on gables and porches.

The most distinctive Stick Style houses include 8 Everett Street, 43 Beach Street, and the two-family houses at 26-28 and 30 Mill Street. Built for Mary E. Noyes around 1879, after designs by Dorchester architect John A. Fox, 26-28 Mill Street occupies a site which had been the location of Noyes family residences from the early 19th century. The E.E. Shepard House at 43 Beach Street retains most of its Stick Style features and is an impressive example—and sole survivor

—of the substantial housing formerly characteristic of this street.

By the 1880's, the Preston lands east of Mill Street had been broken up into house lots and a second grid of streets developed which encompassed the eastern end of Ashland, Greenhill, Everdean, and the upper section of Blanche Street. Most of the houses in this area are set on modest lots and are Queen Anne in style, displaying typical features such as tower-like corner bays, geometrically shaped "Chippendale" porch railings, ornamented gables, and the use of patterned shingling. One of the more distinctive houses is 15 Blanche Street, at the corner of Greenhill Street, which is characterized by its steeply sloped roof and gabled central entry porch. Built around 1882, this house was the home of Dexter J. Cutter, the proprietor of a coal and lumber wharf at Commercial Point. Also dating

from about the same time is the Queen Anne house with Stick Style features which was built at 43 Mill Street for Boston businessman Erastus Willard.

As late as the 1890's, an architecturally ambitious residence was constructed at 29 Mill Street on a lot at the corner of Ashland. This robust Queen Anne style dwelling, notable for its Colonial Revival detailing, round corner tower, and wrap-around porch, was, however, the last large-scale house to be built on the street.

At the end of the century, a group of modest Queen Anne houses were put up by speculators along the northern end of Mill Street near Commercial Street. On the Victory Road end of Everdean and Blanche Streets, small Queen Anne houses on lots of less than 2,000 square feet completed the 19th-century residential development of the Harrison Square district.

Triple-decker development made only occasional inroads into the older fabric at Harrison Square, although these multiple-family dwellings were constructed on subdivided lots of earlier houses, as in the case of the well-designed group at 18-22 Everett Street. These Colonial Revival triple-deckers with bracketed cornices, colored shingling, double bays, and two-story porch posts were put up by builder Ambrosio Piotto in 1911.



Blanche and Everdean Corner



15 Blanche Street

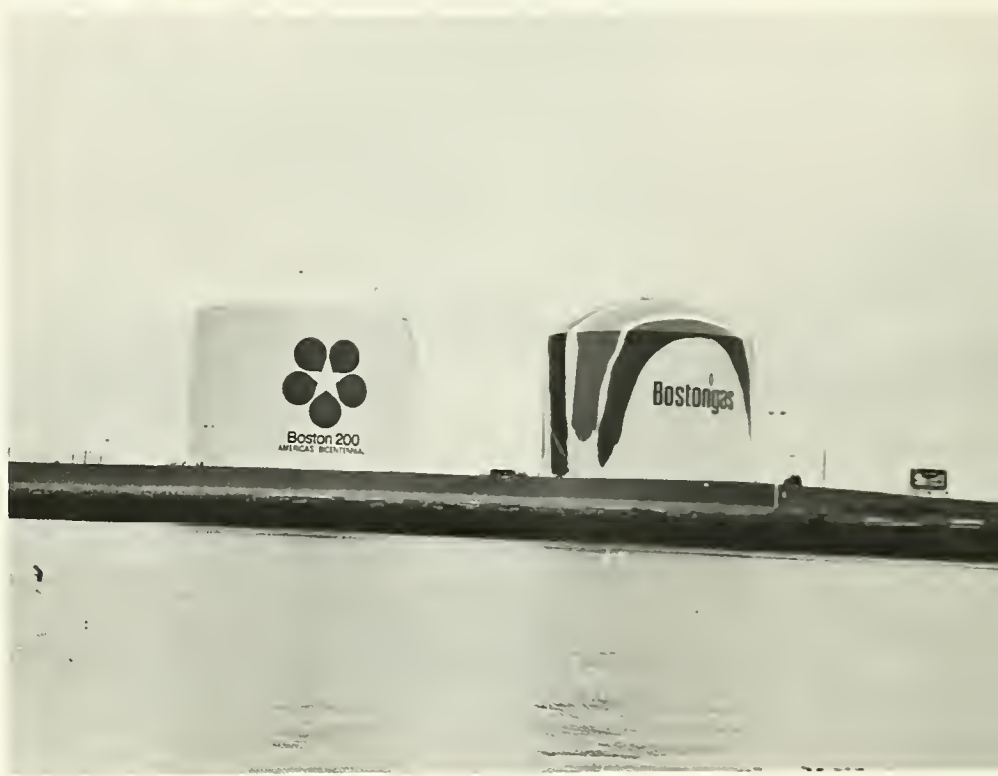


18-22 Everett Street

The industrial future of Commercial Point after Dorchester's annexation to Boston was determined in 1872 when the Boston Gas Light Company purchased a considerable tract of land there for the construction of a new station. The project was delayed for ten years, but in the early 1880's two round gas holders and other large brick buildings were built for gas manufacture and distribution. John Preston's chocolate mill, a coal wharf, a foundry, and other industrial activities remained on Commercial Point, which was also the location of the small dwellings of Irish gas company workers, laborers, and foundry workers. Lumber yards and wharves continued to operate along Commercial Street between the railroad crossing and Park Street, a pattern of use which extended into the 20th century.

The Barque Warwick Cove and Tenean Creek were gradually filled during the 19th and 20th centuries, although sections of the creek remained around Victory Road until quite recently. Landfill and the construction of highways – the Old Colony Parkway (now Morrissey Boulevard) and, in the 1950's, the Southeast Expressway – served to cut off Harrison Square from Dorchester Bay and to isolate it from Commercial Point. Commercial Point is now dominated by the Boston Gas Company's boldly painted tanks. This modern industrial landscape creates a striking contrast to the 19th-century atmosphere of neighboring Clam Point.

Boston Gas Company Tanks, 1979





9 Ashland Street

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